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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 23rd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 11 July 1997, at 10 a.m.

President:	Mr. GALUŠKA	(Czech Republic)
later:	Mr. SOMAVIA (Vice-President)	(Chile)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued):

(b) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (agenda item 3 (b)) (continued) (E/1997/L.27)

The PRESIDENT invited the observer for the United Republic of Tanzania to introduce draft resolution E/1997/L.27 on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Mr. MWAKAWAGO (Observer for the United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, introduced draft resolution E/1997/L.27, entitled "Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation: follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly", which he said might serve as a basis for an intergovernmental agreement.

COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES (continued):

(b) FRESHWATER, INCLUDING CLEAN AND SAFE WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION (agenda item 4 (b)) (E/1997/70)

The PRESIDENT invited the Council to begin its consideration of agenda item 4 (b), which was discussed in the report of the Secretary-General issued as document E/1997/70.

Ms. WALLER-HUNTER (Director, Division for Sustainable Development) said that the report under consideration provided an overview of efforts by the organizations of the United Nations system to coordinate activities relating to water resources. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Subcommittee on Water Resources, a subsidiary body of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD), was responsible for coordinating implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21, it had participated in the preparation of the comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world which had been submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session and to the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session.

Despite the progress that had been made, there was a need for further efforts to improve coordination and cooperation. The General Assembly at its special session had stressed the need to generate financial resources at the

national, regional and international levels. The President of the World Bank had estimated that expenditure of some $600 billion would be needed over the next decade in order to cope with the water problems of developing countries. Despite efforts made during the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, the situation of those countries remained alarming. Nearly a third of the world's population lacked a safe water supply, and nearly half had no access to suitable sanitation. At the current rate of progress, it would be impossible to achieve full coverage in most parts of the world in the near future.

Another important issue concerned information management for the sustainable development of water resources since most countries' data in that area were inadequate in quantity and quality. The international community should therefore increase its efforts to strengthen the capacity of developing countries in that regard, and the United Nations organizations should take a leading role in developing an effective global information network for improved monitoring of regional and global issues. Increased attention should be given to contamination from toxic chemicals and, in particular, from persistent organic pollutants.

The relationship between water, land, biodiversity and climate change had become evident. The organizations of the United Nations system, through the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, would establish close working relationships with the secretariats of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. In addition, since 80 per cent of the pollution of oceans and coastal areas resulted from the contamination of freshwater resources, an equally close relationship must be established with the ACC Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas for implementation of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Sources of Pollution. Consultations between those two subcommittees had already been scheduled for the following month.

Mr. SZÖLLÖSI-NAGY (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), speaking in his capacity as Chairperson of the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources, said that that body had played an

extremely important role in the preparation of the first comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world, on the basis of which the General Assembly had recognized at its special session that water would become a major limiting factor in socio-economic development and had requested that the highest priority should be given to the serious freshwater problems that faced many regions, especially in the developing world. The Commission on Sustainable Development would therefore take up that matter at its sixth session in 1998. The ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources was considering the development of a plan of action and specific modalities for organizing its work. It would welcome advice and proposals from members of the Council.

Mr. SCHUMACHER (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the European Union, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, said that the report of the Secretary-General showed clearly that since the United Nations Water Conference held at Mar del Plata in 1977, the subject of freshwater supply had become an integral part of the proceedings of various organizations of the United Nations system and that a coherent approach to that issue was still lacking. The European Union would therefore have preferred the Secretary-General to make more specific action-oriented recommendations aimed at eliminating duplication and better defining the division of labour within the system. In all regions of the world, greater demands were being made upon water resources, and insufficient water supply was impeding economic and social development, hindering the struggle against poverty and leading inevitably to the deterioration of the environment. A coordinated approach at the United Nations system level was therefore required. There was a need to strengthen the working relationship between the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Inter-agency Working Group on Water established within the framework of the Secretary-General's Special Initiative for Africa. The role of the Commission on Sustainable Development was also of particular importance, as the General Assembly had confirmed at its recent special session.

Since water supply was already the subject of conflicts of interest in certain regions of the world, an integrated approach must be applied not only to departments which dealt with aspects of development, but also to those

which dealt with political matters. At the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the European Union had proposed the establishment of a long-term framework for implementing sustainable use and integrated management of water resources at the national, regional and international levels. It suggested that the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources should draft a report on increasing coordination within the United Nations system by the end of October 1997; such a report could be of assistance in the detailed work to be done in that area in early 1998 with a view to the possible adoption of an international action programme on the sustainable management of water resources.

Mr. MWAKAWAGO (Observer for the United Republic of Tanzania), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that improvement of water supply and sanitation coverage required not only provision of the requisite resources and technical support, but also political will: most of the needed resources must be supplied from public funds. The Group of 77 and China therefore called on the international community to provide increased resources and technical assistance to developing countries as a means of harnessing water resources for social and economic use. In that regard, he commended the efforts of a number of organizations of the United Nations system and the World Bank, particularly the United Nations Special Initiative for Africa. There was a need for coordination between the different organizations which dealt with water at the national and international levels. The General Assembly at its recent special session had recommended that the issue of freshwater should be discussed in a comprehensive manner with a view to initiating a strategic approach to all aspects of the sustainable use of freshwater for social and economic purposes and that a dialogue on all issues related to freshwater should be organized under the auspices of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session in 1998. The intergovernmental process would be fruitful only if the international community was committed to allocating additional financial resources to the achievement of those goals. The Group of 77 and China considered that the Secretary-General's recommendations and proposals should be referred to the Commission on Sustainable Development for comprehensive discussion.

Mr. Yong Shik HWANG (Republic of Korea) said that although freshwater issues had risen to prominence on the international agenda over the

past 25 years, there was still no mechanism for integrated freshwater management and data assessment at the global level. The Republic of Korea shared the concerns expressed by other delegations over freshwater shortages in various regions of the world and was disturbed by the possibility of depletion of those resources and the ongoing decline in water quality.

His delegation called for scrupulous implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21. All national programmes should promote an integrated, multi-sectoral approach to water development management which should serve as a catalyst for sustainable social progress and economic growth. It was important to provide financial assistance and technology transfer at the international level in order to facilitate the implementation of those objectives, particularly in developing countries. His delegation welcomed the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and strongly supported its implementation and international discussions aimed at curtailing seawater pollution caused by persistent organic pollutants. As the Secretary-General had suggested, the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources should strengthen its ties with other United Nations organizations dealing with water issues in order to better reflect the clear links between water resource management and land management, aquatic ecosystem preservation and climate change. There was also a need for closer cooperation between the Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Subcommittee on Oceans and Coastal Areas. Last, his delegation welcomed the intergovernmental dialogue to be launched by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its sixth session.

Ms. LINN LOCHER (Observer for Switzerland) said that the Sixth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly had made major progress during the month of April: the new International Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses emphasized the important principle of the fair and equitable use of international watercourses and the prohibition on causing major damage to riparian States. Mention of that new Convention should have been included in the Secretary-General's report. The needs and specific situation of each country should be taken into consideration during the development of policies and programmes of action. Switzerland, whose territory included the headwaters of many major rivers, had regulated its relations with its neighbours through a lengthy series of

agreements. Regional cooperation for watershed management was an essential aspect of implementation of sustainable freshwater management. The participants at the First Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, which had recently been held at Helsinki, had decided to encourage implementation of Agenda 21 at the regional level with a view to protecting waters from pollution and eliminating the non-sustainable use thereof.

Switzerland would continue to work with those countries to improve the supply of safe drinking water and set up additional sanitation systems in developing countries, both through programmes of technical assistance that bore in mind the socio-cultural and natural environments and involved users in decision-making and through environmentally friendly technology transfer. She emphasized the importance of an integrated approach to the protection and sustainable management of freshwater. In view of the close links between water and land, particularly with regard to mountains and forests, her Government planned to organize a workshop on watershed management as part of the preparations for the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

Mr. CRUZ de MELLO (Brazil) said the fact that Brazil alone accounted for 8 per cent of the world's freshwater resources was indicative of the importance to that country of effective freshwater management. The country's water resources policy took the river basin as the unit for planning, placed all sectors of use on an equal basis, called for rational pricing policies and emphasized decentralized and participatory management of water resources. At the regional level, Brazil was participating in the inter-American water resource network established by the Organization of American States, and its cooperation with neighbouring States was regulated by various treaties. Several projects were also being carried out through bilateral cooperation.

The Secretary-General had rightly emphasized that there was a growing demand for water supply and sanitation in developing countries, particularly in urban areas. In order to meet those needs, partnerships must be established between the public and private sectors and between national and

local institutions with the understanding that those efforts must be complemented by increased international cooperation. The Council should establish precise guidelines in that respect.

His Government was also working to promote ecologically sustainable agricultural development. Several initiatives had been carried out in rural areas in order to foster change in production techniques as a means of reducing the use of chemicals to improve water quality. Generally speaking, Brazil was giving priority to an integrated approach based on the endogenous development of simple and efficient technologies. However, it required international cooperation in order to improve its techniques of institutional management.

The need for more accurate data on water resources was another issue mentioned in the Secretary-General's report. His delegation suggested that there should be a world-wide data re-assessment and that monitoring of that data would be facilitated by a review of the Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS).

Ms. DOWDESWELL (Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)) said that UNEP had played a critical role in encouraging an environmentally sustainable approach to the conservation of freshwater resources. As a result of the recent special session of the General Assembly, UNEP had decided to reorient its programmes towards an integrated approach to the management and use of water resources based on the concept of the drainage basin. It was developing practical legal, economic and institutional tools and developing an assessment methodology for implementation of international river basin agreements, the goal of which was the preparation of a model agreement for riparian countries.

That integrated approach, which was based on a continuum between freshwater and oceans, had prompted the activities of UNEP as secretariat of the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, including negotiations on persistent organic pollutants.

Assessment was another important aspect of UNEP activity. The GEMS water monitoring project, carried out in cooperation with other specialized agencies, was the only such programme in the United Nations system. The UNEP water branch was working with the GEMS centres to improve that programme in

order to make it a more reliable source of information for decision- and policy-making. As one of the three Global Environment Facility (GEF) implementing agencies, UNEP was preparing a proposal for global international water assessment which would be submitted to the GEF council.

Another UNEP leadership area was that of technology development and transfer. The UNEP Water Branch and International Environmental Technology Centre in Japan had cooperated in the identification and analysis of freshwater resource management technology. Regional workshops had been organized and books had been published to disseminate the resulting knowledge.

Within the framework of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, UNEP planned to pay particular attention to small-scale projects carried out in cooperation with the South African Development Community (SADC) with a view to ensuring an equitable and "fair share" approach to water supply issues at the local level.

The economic valuation of water was also of interest to UNEP, which planned to intensify its work on water pricing and subsidies.

Owing to its experience in brokering international environmental agreements, UNEP was uniquely positioned to promote the signing of multilateral agreements on internationally shared watercourses which took account of regional needs.

Water problems involved all sectors and aspects of society, and UNEP planned to promote increased public awareness through its Global Environmental Citizenship Programme. It hoped that the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development would result in consensus on a strategic approach which would encourage the ecologically viable use of water resources by all sectors of society.

Mr. CELEM (Turkey) said his delegation shared the view expressed in the Secretary-General's report that worsening water supply and quality problems were largely the result of poor resource management. If nothing was done to impose more effective management of those resources, many countries, including Turkey, would experience significant water deficits over the next 25 years. A holistic and comprehensive approach to land and water resources development was therefore more necessary than ever.

All countries, particularly developing ones, must integrate sustainable development considerations into their agricultural policy analysis and

planning. There was also a need to promote the use of modern irrigation methods, which wasted less water than primitive methods. In order to prevent waste, domestic policies for water utilization should be reviewed and, in particular, consideration should be given to a rational water pricing system. Public awareness campaigns would doubtless also be useful.

Another useful measure was the treatment and reuse of waste water; however, given the cost of installation, international financial support for such projects was needed at the national and regional levels. Harmonized information systems, which were essential to the integrated assessment and management of water resources, could be implemented only if developing countries first established national information systems in preparation for the creation of data banks.

His delegation supported efforts to streamline the programmes and activities of the United Nations bodies which dealt with water resources along the lines of their respective mandates. Without denying the complexity and multidimensional nature of the water resources issue, he emphasized the need to classify problems in order to avoid rendering international cooperation more difficult.

In order to narrow the gap between developed and developing countries in the area of water resources development, there was a need for strengthened regional and international cooperation for technology transfer and the financing of projects such as those called for by the Global Water Partnership, the costs of which would clearly exceed the financial capabilities of most developing countries.

Mr. CHRISTOFIDES (South Africa) said that if the current trends in water use and population growth continued, South Africa would experience a freshwater shortage during the first half of the twenty-first century. To offset those problems, the Government had adopted a strategy aimed at giving the entire population access to water while encouraging it to preserve that precious resource. A broad campaign had been launched with a view to meeting basic needs of water supply and sanitation at the grassroots level. Over 1,000 projects targeting 4 million people, primarily in the poverty-stricken marginal areas of the country, had been undertaken. A major programme of health and hygiene education had also been launched at the community level with the close cooperation of women.

The new national water policy had made changes in the legislation governing water ownership and guaranteed the right of all citizens to basic services. Several measures had been taken to raise public awareness of the need for responsible use and management of water resources with respect for equity and the public interest.

At the regional level, South Africa had participated in shared water resource projects with neighbouring States for many years. Various agreements had been signed, particularly with the Governments of Swaziland and Lesotho. The South African Development Community Protocol on Shared Water Course Systems was an important initiative for the equitable division of resources between the countries of the sub-continent.

The success of all those efforts would depend on technical and financial assistance from the United Nations system, particularly with regard to capacity-building. Specific recommendations and time frames should be provided in order to streamline the activities of the different bodies. Lastly, with regard to the recommendation made in paragraph 42 of the Secretary-General's report, his delegation preferred to support phased, gradual introduction of water pricing in the developing world.

Mr. PRENDERGAST (Jamaica) said his delegation concurred with the Secretary-General's recommendation of a more comprehensive approach to the examination of water resources, bearing in mind the constraints faced by developing countries and the need to strengthen international cooperation in order to address those problems. The recommendations which had resulted from from the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, which provided an opportunity to build on chapter 18 of Agenda 21 in the areas of capacity-building, human resource development and scientific and technical advances, should serve as a basis for such international cooperation.

Jamaica, like other small island developing States, had to contend with serious water and sanitation problems generated by changes in the pattern of rainfall and the impact of climate change on the hydrological cycle. It therefore looked forward to the comprehensive assessment of freshwater resources which would take place at the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in 1998 and hoped that discussions would include the need for strengthened capacities for monitoring water quality, increased investment in projects designed in cooperation with local communities and, in

particular, with women, and aimed at facilitating access to safe water and sanitation, integrated management of water resources and implementation of policies focused on the protection of watersheds and water basins. He hoped that that session of the Commission would lead to action-oriented measures and to an attempt to build an overall strategic approach to ecologically sustainable management of freshwater resources.

Mr. KAABACHI (Tunisia) noted that implementation of the large-scale sanitation policies necessary to sustainable improvement in the water supply often exceeded the financial capacities of developing countries and that the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session had emphasized that the international community must demonstrate its commitment to providing additional funding to guarantee safe drinking water and a sanitary environment for all. To that end, the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods institutions, should provide technical and financial support to developing countries with a view to the preparation of strategies for sustainable water management and national plans for promoting water management techniques. The Commission had also appealed to developed countries to strengthen regional and international cooperation for technology transfer and funding of comprehensive programmes. The international conference on safe drinking water resources, to be organized by France in 1998, would provide an opportunity to take the necessary decisions in that regard.

Tunisia had developed a master plan for rational management of the country's water resources which would guarantee effective, balanced distribution of the various uses of water. Many small-scale construction projects had been undertaken in order to raise the water table and meet the growing needs of rapidly expanding agriculture. The Government had also worked to protect the oases in the south of the country, which were at risk of desertification, through new irrigation techniques. The development of industry and tourism, both of which involved major freshwater consumption, posed a serious threat to agriculture by drawing off water resources. Tunisia had attempted to solve that problem in several ways, including the recycling of water so that it could be reused for irrigation. However, the Tunisians were aware that lasting improvement in the water supply would require a solution to other related problems and had therefore implemented a comprehensive programme, within the framework of sustainable management of

human settlements, which had already made it possible to implement several sanitation projects and to set up some 50 sewage analysis laboratories. A major groundwater desalination programme had also been undertaken in the arid regions in the south of the country.

Within the framework of the national programme for the development of isolated rural areas, a national solidarity fund, financed through voluntary contributions, had been established in order to, inter alia, ensure that the poor had access to safe drinking water and to provide sanitation to the communities in which they lived. Last, the Government had established the Tunisian Environment and Development Observatory, an ongoing system for the collection, production, analysis and dissemination of information on the state of the environment in Tunisia.

Mr. JARRAUD (World Meteorological Association (WMO)) said that water use had increased by a factor of 6 between 1900 and 1995, more than double the rate of population growth during the same period, a fact which explained the increased competition for water for agricultural, domestic and industrial purposes. That situation was further aggravated by irregular rainfall and by floods and droughts, both of which affected the supply of clean and safe freshwater for domestic use. Furthermore, in the longer term, the projected climate change might modify rainfall distribution patterns with serious consequences for regional water resources, as stated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The need for quantitatively and qualitatively reliable information on freshwater resources and their management, particularly in urban areas, had been emphasized at HABITAT II (1996), and, more recently, by the United Nations General Assembly at its special session on the review and appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the water resources available in the world, WMO, at the request of the Commission on Sustainable Development and in cooperation with United Nations agencies, particularly UNESCO, had recently undertaken a comprehensive assessment of the freshwater resources of the world. The assessment had confirmed that if current trends continued, two thirds of the world's population might experience moderate to high water stress by the year 2025. Furthermore, the General Assembly had recently called for the strengthening of the data collection capabilities of

Governments and international institutions in order to facilitate the assessment and management of water resources and the exchange of hydrological information. It was therefore imperative to strengthen local networks for the acquisition and collection of hydrological data, which were deteriorating in many countries.

In view of its mandate to assist Governments in addressing water-related issues, WMO had initiated the World Hydrological Cycle Observing System (WHYCOS), which was being implemented by stages in various parts of the world with the assistance of the World Bank, the European Union and various regional institutions in order to strengthen national and regional water resource assessment capabilities. At the regional level, WMO had also organized two water assessment conferences, one at Addis Ababa in 1995 and the other in Costa Rica in 1996. A third such conference was scheduled to take place in Asia in 1997 or early 1998. The purpose of those conferences was to strengthen the capacities of developing countries through the pooling of human and financial resources.

Since women had been increasingly involved in the planning and implementation of water-related projects and programmes, particularly in developing countries, they should be encouraged to play a greater role in water and sanitation schemes at the community level. National development plans should therefore place greater emphasis on strengthening their capabilities.

Within the framework of the United Nations system, the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources was the mechanism which should be strengthened so that it could help the international community to solve the major problems of the future.

Mr. Somavía (Chile) took the Chair.

Mr. WIJKMAN (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that the work done by UNDP in four essential areas (deforestation, sustainable development, food security and water) showed how important it was to include environmental concerns in the struggle against poverty and emphasized the interdependence between water and food and between energy and forests.

Because of its multisectoral approach, UNDP was in a position to respond to the major challenges presented by the water crisis. Integrated management of water resources was essential and should include all such resources. It

had been about a year since UNDP had introduced a new integrated strategy for water resource management. An essential aspect of that question was demand management, in other words, the need to set prices which corresponded to the real value of water. That presupposed the elimination of all subsidies, which were often counter-productive. Of course, local conditions and the situation of the very poor must be taken into account and funding must be provided.

There was a need to establish mechanisms to strengthen cooperation at all levels. The Global Water Partnership had been created with that goal in mind. The ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources would also have a key role to play over the next few years in implementing the programmes which had been adopted. The United Nations agencies should serve as catalysts by fostering capacity-building and facilitating contact between the private and public sectors. Recently, UNDP had set up a special programme to encourage partnerships between the public and private sectors, particularly in the areas of waste and water management. Water was specifically mentioned in over two thirds of its country programmes for 1997-1999, which meant that all of those programmes would benefit from the progress made within the framework of the global partnership.

He emphasized the importance of good water resource management for the elimination of poverty since health and food were heavily dependent on those resources. Water could no longer be taken for granted, and food security would become a major problem in the coming years. Unless a way was found to solve the water crisis, there would be an increase in tension and conflict concerning access to that essential resource, and the struggle against poverty would fail. Therefore, UNDP was determined to increase its activities on behalf of integrated water resource management.

Mr. WINNICK (United States of America) said that water was the primary indispensable resource and that the current situation, in which rising demands were increasingly exceeding supply and quality was increasingly threatened, could not continue. The international community had recognized the problem, and it was time to seek solutions. The United States therefore supported the Commission on Sustainable Development's recommendation that the highest priority should be given to the freshwater problems facing the world. The formulation of concerted approaches would require cooperation among Governments and coordination of the activities of international organizations,

scientific and research institutes and the private sector. He therefore welcomed recommendations aimed at strengthening coordination and cooperation. At the Group of Eight (G8) Summit held at Denver, participants had pledged to improve coordination of efforts in the area of freshwater and to promote bilateral and regional cooperation in that regard.

The Commission on Sustainable Development could and should play a central role in developing programmes and policies to provide safe drinking water to the world's population and to reduce international tensions on water issues. The agenda for the Commission's sixth session should be carefully considered with a view to building on the knowledge already acquired without duplicating past efforts.

The United States believed that water supply and sanitation issues were most effectively addressed at the local, national and subregional levels. It endorsed the recommendation that the United Nations should intensify its assistance to national efforts to build up needed expertise among water users and decision-makers at all levels. The United Nations system should also play a role in helping countries to develop national strategies and policies to promote, among other things, efficient water use.

Improved coordination of field activities should be a priority for all resident coordinators. Ensuring an effective allocation of financial resources was also important and could be achieved through gradual implementation of appropriate pricing policies. His delegation was convinced that the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources would prove capable of playing its important role, supported the establishment of close links between the respective secretariats, the Subcommittee and organizations and believed that the streamlining efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General would conserve resources and reduce duplication.

Mr. GARCIA MORITAN (Argentina) said that Argentina had long been aware of the importance of the quality of drinking water and the protection of basins and had therefore adopted a strict national policy which included the construction and installation of water treatment plants, the installation of meters, the establishment of management committees and appeals to the public.

The United Nations bodies, particularly UNEP, UNESCO, the World Health Organization (WHO) and WMO, under the coordination of the Commission on Sustainable Development, together with international financial institutions,

should continue to provide technical and financial assistance to help countries evaluate their water resources. It was also important to set up institutional and financial mechanisms which would allow countries to benefit from activities carried out, not only with regard to water resources, but also under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The activities undertaken should have the following focuses: evaluation of surface and groundwater resources from the quantitative and qualitative points of view, development of master plans for management of water resources at the level of individual countries and that of basins, and establishment of mechanisms for coordinating the activities of agencies in the United Nations system in order to extend their cooperation to include various national bodies concerned with water resources. Contact must also be maintained between hydrologists and public and private decision-makers, all of whom must be made well aware of the increasingly important role played by water, and greater emphasis must be placed on training through the inclusion of water-related issues in curriculums at all levels of education and the organization of major public information campaigns. High priority in resource allocation must be given to United Nations agency programmes and, at the country level, there should be wider dissemination of those programmes and of the conclusions of inter-agency bodies and the documentation resulting from their work.

Mr. A.K. CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) said that, while water was not new to the global agenda, it had taken on critical importance, as emphasized by the General Assembly at its recent special session. The challenges which it presented, particularly to developing countries, were enormous. The ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources seemed to be duly seized of the matter; his delegation asked to be updated on its work and wondered how the Subcommittee perceived the effectiveness of coordination of United Nations bodies at the country level with regard to the application of integrated approaches to the development, management and use of water resources.

Except for finalization of a consensus document (of which, moreover, his delegation would like to obtain a copy), the Inter-agency Steering Committee for Water Supply and Sanitation did not really seem to have begun its coordinated action. His Government believed that greater coordination was

required, particularly with regard to water resources assessment and protection of water quality. He asked what action the United Nations system was taking to remedy the problem of arsenic pollution of drinking water in Bangladesh, a problem which affected the daily lives of hundreds and thousands of people in the south-west of that country, as well as parts of India and China, and which had a potential degenerative impact on millions of young and unborn children. His delegation also wondered what action was being taken by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), which was closely involved in water supply programmes in those countries. It was essential for the United Nations system to announce a coordinated programme to address that problem, and it would be worth setting up an early warning system on drinking water pollution.

He emphasized the importance of capacity-building for sustainable water resource management in developing and, in particular, the least developed countries and welcomed the fact that the First World Water Forum had been held with a central theme of "Water resources management in the next century". As the theme of the 1998 World Day for Water would be "Groundwater", it would be necessary to determine the best means of ensuring sustainable development and management of groundwater resources. The United Nations system should assist the developing countries to organize meaningfully the observance of that Day. His delegation supported the establishment of a global water information network and believed that all organizations of the United Nations system which dealt with water resources should join the Global Water Partnership and that the World Water Council and the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council should harmonize their work to support national efforts. Furthermore, all the relevant organizations of the United Nations system should be fully involved in preparations for the UNESCO conference on global water resources to be held in June 1998. Last, the Commission on Sustainable Development should examine the role of the private sector when it considered the question of freshwater management at its sixth session.

Mr. KREISEL (World Health Organization (WHO)) said that access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation was a vital necessity, the lack of which continued to result in millions of deaths per year among children with diarrhoeal diseases and over 200,000 deaths per year from schistosomiasis. Yet those diseases could be prevented through the use of molluscicides,

reservoir management and health education. Unfortunately, intervention took place only after the appearance of public health problems related to water supply, whereas disease control and health protection should be a primary purpose of water resource development. Unfortunately, human health was a lower priority than in the past; social and health concerns were receiving less attention than environmental economics and cost recovery.

Nevertheless, WHO continued to place health-related concerns at the heart of all its water and environment programmes. For example, it served as the secretariat for the Africa 2000 network, which was an initiative launched by all the States of sub-Saharan Africa with a view to accelerating water supply and sanitation development in the region. It also updated periodically its Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality, which were intended to assist Governments in establishing safe levels of consumption for potentially hazardous water constituents. In that regard, he informed the representative of Bangladesh that WHO had already held a workshop in India on the problem of arsenic in drinking water. In addition, WHO served as the secretariat for the WHO/(Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) (FAO)/UNEP/HABITAT Panel of Experts on Environmental Management for Vector Control (PEEM), which, for the last 15 years, had been highlighting vector-related health issues in water resources development. One of the main features of WHO programmes was their interorganizational nature, and WHO was prepared to cooperate with all other organizations willing to consider the health aspects of water development.

Ms. BAI Yongjie (China) said that the report of the Secretary-General was an excellent basis for Council discussion. It clearly demonstrated the growing gap between the demand for, and the world supply of, freshwater, which might soon become a serious barrier to worldwide economic and social development unless the international community acted quickly.

The specific measures taken to date were insufficient. First, there must be more active cooperation between United Nations institutions and bodies, which must adopt a global strategy for the protection and use of water resources. Since developing countries still lacked capacities with regard to the assessment, management and rational use of those resources, it was urgent that the commitments which had already been made in that regard but which, generally speaking, had remained a dead letter, should be fulfilled as a

condition for any effective action. Second, coordination must be established between agencies of the United Nations system and Governments, which must henceforth integrate drinking water supply and sanitation issues into their national development plans. Third, within the framework of the United Nations system, there must be increased coordination with ACC with a view to determining a clear division of work. In particular, closer links should be established between the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources and the secretariats of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Her delegation welcomed the General Assembly's decision at its nineteenth special session to give high priority to freshwater and sanitation and hoped that the anticipated dialogue would take place.

Mr. SFEIR-YOUNIS (World Bank) said that the World Bank fully agreed with the Secretary-General, who had stated in his report that there was a new consensus on water management through partnership and collaboration. The Bank's policy and strategy in that area were founded on the "Dublin principles", enunciated in 1992 and incorporated in Agenda 21, which were the following: freshwater was a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustained life, development and the environment; water development and management should be based on a common approach involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels; women could play a central role in the provision, management and safeguarding of water; and water had an economic value and should be recognized as an economic good. Those principles required a consideration of existing analytical and planning frameworks, institutional and regulatory frameworks, incentive structures, water-conserving technologies, distribution systems and stakeholders' participation, environmental protection, human resources development and development implementation issues.

He highlighted two examples of cooperation between the Bank and the agencies represented at the day's meeting. The first was the Global Water Partnership, which was an international mechanism whose primary objectives were to support integrated water resources management programmes and to encourage Governments, aid agencies and other stakeholders to adopt consistent, complementary policies and programmes. The Bank considered that

the Partnership had been unacceptably slow in translating the principles articulated at Dublin and elsewhere into practice.

The second example was that of strategy and partnership, particularly with regard to water resources in sub-Saharan Africa. That strategy had been discussed at two technical workshops held at Nairobi and Dakar in February 1996. The participants, among whom had been representatives of the United Nations, bilateral donors, ministers, NGOs and the private sector, had supported five priorities: to enhance service coverage, giving priority to the poor; to ensure food security through irrigation and water harvesting; to improve water quality and human health; to protect watersheds and wetlands; and to establish inter-country river basin cooperation. Implementation of such a strategy would require better donor coordination. However, donors could build on existing frameworks such as the Pan-African Partnership or the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)/World Bank Water Supply and Sanitation Programme. An informal working group on water was currently developing a coordinated plan of action within the framework of the United Nations Special Initiative for Africa.

Mr. KASRI (Observer for Indonesia) said that the increasing degradation of water resources was hindering access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation for a considerable part of the world's population. That crisis therefore threatened not only economic development, but the very survival of humanity.

There was no doubt that the United Nations system had made progress since the late 1980s in increasing global awareness of the growing crisis. Many intergovernmental bodies and organizations of the United Nations system, particularly the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, had established a comprehensive assessment of world freshwater resources.

The Council should follow up on that assessment by giving priority to the freshwater problems with which many regions were already faced. It should also support the idea of organizing a dialogue at the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development in an attempt to develop a strategy for sustainable use of freshwater resources. His delegation had high hopes of such a dialogue. It was also important that the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade should be fully implemented. If such an

initiative was to be successful, the international community must provide additional financial resources, as the Commission on Sustainable Development had recommended.

While the first priority must be to meet basic needs for safe drinking water and sanitation, developing countries also badly needed freshwater for agricultural irrigation, industrial development and hydroelectric generation. Because of the complexity of the issue, the fact that a certain amount of progress had been made in implementing Agenda 21 had not halted the drift towards crisis, and a more comprehensive approach was needed. It was also important to address duplication in the activities of organizations in the United Nations system and to attempt to streamline those activities.

One major obstacle to implementation of Agenda 21 was the lack of expertise and of national and human capacities. The Secretary-General had therefore rightly stated in his report that the United Nations system could continue to provide technical and financial support to national efforts to develop, among others, sustainable water strategies that addressed basic human needs and preservation of ecosystems. However, in addition, national and human capacity-building were imperative in order to ensure stability.

Poor countries were at risk of further marginalization as water resources became increasingly scarce and became subject to more intense competition. Policies and programmes aimed at ensuring equitable access to freshwater should therefore accompany regional and international cooperation. At the same time, it was important to create an enabling environment for investment in that area.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.